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Citation for published version:

Deane-Cox, S 2012, 'The framing of a belle infidèle: Paratexts, retranslations and Madame Bovary', *Essays in French Literature*, vol. 49, pp. 79-96.

<<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=070528352227163;res=IELHSS>>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Essays in French Literature

Publisher Rights Statement:

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The framing of a belle infidèle: Paratexts, retranslations and *Madame Bovary*

Abstract: This article seeks to demonstrate how paratextual material can be used as an illuminating point of entry into the complex, multifaceted process of transmission and substitution that is retranslation. It will undertake a case study on the British translations of *Madame Bovary*, eschewing a linguistic line of enquiry in favour of scrutinizing the paratexts for overt or covert signs of how the work has been framed and presented over time. The article will first map out a space for a ‘translatorial paratext’ within Genette’s (1987) typology. It will then bring paratextual evidence into direct dialogue with theoretical approaches to the textual and extratextual behaviour of retranslation.

Keywords: Retranslation – theory and methodology; French literature; Flaubert; paratext; invisibility

Introduction

Literary retranslation is both a recurring and a protean phenomenon, generating multiple target language versions of a given source text in varied guises and at intervals which range from the sporadic to the isochronous. Nowhere is the mercurial nature of retranslation more evident than in the history of the British¹ versions of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* in terms of when and how they appeared. In fact, this history begins in close proximity to the author himself when governess to his niece, Julie Herbert, carries out the first English translation in 1857. Flaubert declares it to be “un chef d’oeuvre” (1929, 26), but no publishing deal was ever secured in London and no manuscript was ever discovered, confining the original translation effort to the annals of obscurity. This faltering start does not, however, set the tone for the subsequent fate of *Madame Bovary* in Britain; the novel has been translated in full seven times over a period which spans from the end of the nineteenth century to

present day, and has manifested itself in a multitude of different configurations, including reprints and re-editions.

In the face of such multiplicity, a powerful heuristic tool is needed – one which can disentangle the behaviour of initial translations and retranslations from a range of perspectives. This paper aims to demonstrate how Genette’s concept of paratext can meet this need by virtue of its pivotal position as a “threshold” between the textual and the extratextual. Genette defines this threshold as constituting “une zone non seulement de transition, mais de *transaction*: lieu privilégié d’une pragmatique et d’une stratégie, d’une action sur le public au service d’une meilleur accueil du texte et d’une lecture plus pertinente” (1987, 8, original emphasis). And within the context of retranslation, the privileged transactional scope of the paratext is extended further still. Here, it mediates not simply the reading and reception of one work, singular, but rather the varied and various readings of the source text as interpreted by the multiple target texts, the positioning of these target texts in relation to each other, and the reintroductions of the work into an ever-changing socio-cultural context.

Moreover, the pragmatic and strategic manoeuvrings observable in a given corpus can then be used to shed new light on previous theoretical approaches to the hows and whys of retranslation. In contrast to the prevalence of the phenomenon itself, existing thinking on retranslation tends to be sparse and somewhat impressionistic, as evidenced by certain a priori text-bound assumptions. One such approach is the deterministic vector of progress proposed by Antoine Berman; starting with the logic that “toute première traduction est maladroite”, retranslation subsequently emerges under the sign of “traduction accomplie” as a restorative countermeasure against “la défaillance originelle” (1990, 4-5). Or, as the pithy Retranslation Hypothesis puts it, “later translations tend to be closer to the source text” (Chesterman, 2004, 8)². The parameters of the debate are then extended into the extratextual arena by Anthony Pym who makes a distinction between diachronically situated “passive retranslation” and synchronically situated “active retranslation” (1998: 82). The study of the former category is flatly rejected as “redundant” since temporally dislocated retranslations are deemed simply to “respond to long-term processes of linguistic or cultural change in the target community” (*ibid.*).

Conversely, the behaviour of active retranslations “sharing virtually the same cultural location or generation must respond to something else” (*ibid.*), namely challenge and rivalry.

However, this bridging move between textual and extratextual evidence frequently eclipses the paratext as an illuminating source of information. The following case study on *Madame Bovary* will emphasize the analytical reach of the paratext whose borderland situation allows a more nuanced exploration of how textual concerns of improvement and extratextual concerns of reception and (non-) challenge are negotiated within a given target text. In the first case, focus will converge on paratextual claims pertaining to translation strategy and will therefore refrain from commenting on whether or not they are substantiated in the text itself. In the second, paratextual material will be scrutinized for evidence of passive or active stances. Overall, findings will serve to reconstruct the retranslation history of a work which first emerged as a *succès de scandale* to then become a *chef d’oeuvre*.

1. Towards ‘un paratexte traductoriel’

Translation Studies has had frequent recourse to paratextual analyses as a means of situating translated works in their wider socio-cultural context. But all too often, the expediency of this strategy has allowed the relationship between translation and paratext to evade critical evaluation. First and foremost, the question must be posed: what room is there for translation in Genette’s paradigm? In his conclusion to *Seuils*, Genette acknowledges that translation is endowed with a “pertinence paratextuelle [...] indéniable” (1987, 408) and regrets not having had the opportunity to elaborate further on this connection. Approaching this limitation from a Translation Studies perspective, Tahir-Gürçağlar criticizes Genette on a number of counts, beginning with his apparent “reluctance to tackle the problematic aspects of elaborating translation as paratext” (2002, 45-6). In so doing, she interprets the pertinent relationship between translation and paratext as a wholly analogic one. Hence her second criticism; given that all paratext is subordinate to its text in Genette’s model, then accordingly all translation “will serve only its original” (*ibid.*, 46) – a servitude which has long been rejected in translation scholarship. However, Tahir-Gürçağlar does not fully consider the conditions which Genette places on the relationship; the paratextual pertinence of translation comes to the fore “en

particulier lorsqu'elle est plus ou moins revue ou contrôlée *par l'auteur*, [...] et à plus forte raison lorsqu'elle est entièrement assuré par lui" (1987, 408, my emphasis). In other words, the relationship is predicated specifically on a correspondence between *self*-translation and paratext. Given that the principle stake of the paratext is to "assurer [au texte] un sort conforme au dessein de l'auteur" (*ibid.*, 411), then the commentary on the original that is inherent in the translation must also be aligned with authorial design. Once any process of adaptation occurs beyond self-translation, the parallels between paratext and translation necessarily collapse. It follows that Tahir-Gürçağlar's criticism must be refined. It is not the case that Genette posits a widespread and subservient analogy of translation as paratext, rather, it is the translator as commentator who is subordinate to the author-translator as commentator.

Of course, Genette accepts that not all paratextual material stems directly from the author, identifying contributions in the shape of the publisher's paratext and allographic, i.e. third party, prefaces. It is in respect of this latter category that Genette alludes to translation as a common site for "allographes ultérieures" (1987, 226-7). However, he briefly problematizes this phenomenon in a footnote: "Le traducteur-préfacier peut éventuellement commenter, entre autres, sa propre traduction; sur ce point et en ce sens, sa préface cesse alors d'être allographe" (*ibid.*, 227). On the one hand, the translator is affirmed as a valid commentator on their own translation work and sees their position elevated above that of third party. On the other hand, however, this elevation is tempered; Genette does not go so far as to endorse the translator as (authorial) commentator on the original, with the result that the translator is bereft of any clear-cut position within the paratextual model.

In response to this indeterminateness, I would like to supplement Genette's paradigm with a "paratexte traductoirel", thereby placing stronger emphasis on the tangible and mediative paratextual presence of the translator. Both the analogic and concrete interpretations of the translator in Genette's concept of paratext serve to confirm the "translator's invisibility", a phenomenon brought into view by Venuti and underpinned, in part, by "the individualistic conception of authorship [which] devalues translation" (1995: 7), and which is very much in evidence in Genette's work. In essence then, the translatorial paratext will help bring the translator out of the shadows.

2. A paratextual survey of *Madame Bovary* in translation

The following empirical study will highlight how the paratextual information which frames the *Madame Bovary* translations can offer a window on to the various mediating strategies adopted by the translators and publishers. In turn, these strategies can be brought into dialogue with theories pertaining to the behaviour of retranslation.

2.1 Initial negotiations

A gap of almost thirty years separates the publication of the source text and the appearance in 1886 of the initial British version, translated by Eleanor Marx-Aveling³, daughter of Karl Marx. Published by Vizetelly & Co., its appearance was undoubtedly held at bay by a widespread distrust of French morality. Such suspicion is nowhere more evident than in the ultra-conservative *Quarterly Review* which in 1862 denounces *Madame Bovary* as indicative of a “literature as filthy, as frivolous, and as false as ever sapped the morals of a nation” which has been “poisoned by the nastiness of a prurient mind” (272-3).

The threat posed by Flaubert’s prurient mind appears to have diminished considerably by 1886, when the author is proclaimed as “one of the high priests” of fiction (Kennard, 1886, 693). But Marx-Aveling’s translatorial peritext would seem to suggest a lingering wariness among the public at large. Hence her assertion that “Flaubert is still so little known in England, his work so completely misunderstood, that some words of introduction to this translation — the first English one of “*Madame Bovary*” — are a necessity” (1886, vii). The translator’s introduction can be read as an attempt to counteract the author’s muddled reputation, not least by underscoring that “in Flaubert we have the direct antithesis of Zola” (*ibid.*, xvi). Although on the surface, this reference to Zola contrasts his naturalist style with Flaubert’s impersonal one, it adopts a greater significance when we consider that Vizetelly & Co. were twice convicted on charges of obscenity for their translations of *L’Assomoir*, *Germinal* and *Le Ventre de Paris*. By distancing the work of Flaubert from the work of Zola, Marx-Aveling is essentially distancing her publishers from their own scandal; this work of

innocence by dissociation thus demonstrates how the translatorial peritext can simultaneously serve the needs of an editorial one.

Marx-Aveling's introduction also addresses the text itself in its allusion to translation strategies. Here, the translator adopts a position that might be taken for self-effacement:

no critic can be more painfully aware than I am of the weaknesses, the shortcomings, the failures of my work; but at least the translation is faithful. [...] It is pale and feeble by the side of its original. Yet, if it induces some readers to go to that original, if it helps to make known to those who cannot thus study this work of the greatest of French novelists after Balzac, I am content. (*ibid.*, xxii)

It is important to note that the negative attributes are accompanied by two very persuasive concessions: the watchword 'faithful' is a powerful counterbalance to the previous caveats, while the translation is further validated by the emphasis on accessibility above and beyond style. The paratextual posturing of Marx-Aveling in relation to the extratext and the text therefore reminds us that we are dealing not only with "un espace de feintes, d'esquives, de dérobades *de l'auteur*" (del Lungo, 2009, 105, my emphasis), but also of the translator.

Admittedly, Marx-Aveling's manoeuvrings did not lead to positive reviews; for example, *The Athenaeum* greets her efforts at the time as "laborious, but unequally effective" (1886: 429). In other words, the translatorial peritext does nothing to dispel outside criticism, and by extension, to refute Berman's claim that initial translations are in some way deficient. Nevertheless, it would appear that the text has prevailed despite this dubious reception⁴: Marx-Aveling's version has been reissued at least nineteen times, by thirteen different publishers, with the two most recent reprints appearing in 2011.

The vast majority of these reprints omit the translator's original introduction. As Genette notes, "la durée du paratexte est souvent à éclipses" (1987, 12) as a consequence of its functional character; in this instance, the perpetuation of Marx-Aveling's work well beyond its immediate temporal point of entry, i.e. beyond the reach of the Victorian censors, is offset by the discontinuation of her introductory stratagems. But on another level, the very presence of Marx-Aveling's translation suggests that the teleology of retranslation may be somewhat more confused than previously allowed

for. We now have a situation where the initial translation reappears after the most recent retranslation; not only does this perplex the history-as-progress logic of the Retranslation Hypothesis, but it also frustrates Pym's seemingly clear-cut differentiation between passive and active retranslations. If passivity is to be determined by the passage of time, which supposedly ensures that "knowledge of one version does not conflict with knowledge of another" (1998: 82), then how do we account for the endurance of versions such as this initial translation whose reproduction integrates them firmly as potentially *active* challenges in the literary field?

Yet more confounding variables comes to light considering that the British public had, in actual fact, access to a partial translation of some key passages of *Madame Bovary* as early as 1878 when George Saintsbury published an essay on Flaubert in the *Fortnightly Review* (580-81). Here, Saintsbury incorporates the translation of three lengthy passages from the work (an extract from I.7 and two passages from II.12) which can thus be accredited as the first target language means of entry granted to the source text.

Unquestionably, Marx-Aveling's version can still lay claim to the status of the first definitive translated version; but the boundaries of retranslation become blurred since her work now incorporates what can be defined as a retranslation of the above passages. This typography becomes even more disordered when we uncover the paratextual manipulation ensconced in the 1928 J.M. Dent reprint of Marx-Aveling's translation. Not only is Marx-Aveling's introduction removed, but it is also replaced by Saintsbury's aforementioned article, retaining his translation of the three passages. Nor does the substitution end there; rather, an exploration of the text itself reveals that the Marx-Aveling passages have also been removed and replaced by those which Saintsbury has translated and which now appear in the new introduction. This stealthy act of grafting one version onto another means that Dent has issued a hybrid translation framed by a hybrid peritext. In the first instance, Berman's straightforward move from defective initial version to retranslation is distorted by the composite nature of the target text. In the second, an article that was at once extratext (review) and text (translation) has now become peritext – part allographic, part translatorial.

2.2 Variances

The patchwork nature of the initial version(s) then gives way to a more distinct succession of retranslations. That said, there was no great rush to take up the gauntlet at the end of the nineteenth century; as Newman writes in 1895, “if translation be any index to the English appreciation of a foreign author, it cannot be said that Flaubert’s following in this country is very large” (813). In 1905, almost two decades after Marx-Aveling’s attempt, comes the first retranslation proper, published in the Lotus Library series of Greening & Co and ‘done into English’ by Henry Blanchamp. This version, like that of Saintsbury, is partial: gone is the obsequious portrayal of Homais in the company of M. Larrivière, gone is the vigil held by Homais and M. Bournisien at Emma’s deathbed, and gone is the blind beggar. Similarly, the novel is brought to an abrupt end with the words Charles “fell to the ground; he was dead”, hence no banishment of Berthe to the cotton mill and no *croix d’honneur* for Homais.

The textual absences are mirrored on a peritextual level as there is no translatorial introduction, while the publisher’s advertisements tell us only that the work was sold for the modest price tag of 1s. 6d. However, this relative lack of framing in itself speaks volumes. The price allows us to surmise that the Lotus Library had a more popular audience in its sights, about whom Vizetelly remarks that “if French fiction was to be offered to English readers at all it must at least be sensational” (1904, 249). As such, the intended readership was one which demanded literature that was entertaining, even titillating. Peritextual commentary on the work would thus be an unnecessary distraction. It is not Flaubert’s literary merit which is marketed here, rather uncomplicated access to Emma’s infamous story in its abridged form, which, although shorn of its religiously sensitive material, still retains all of its more highly-charged scenes. According to the Retranslation Hypothesis, this version should have permitted closer access to the source text; evidently, market conditions mean that the reverse is true.

The next retranslation by J. Lewis May is issued in 1928 by J. Lane and marks a new approach, namely a conspicuous attempt to break with previous versions. A review of the work proffers an interesting reflection on the state of Flaubert translations at that time: “some of the attempts to

translate him are beneath contempt, the remainder survive by lack of competent opposition” (Holbrook, 1928, 202). Notably, it is within this category of ‘competent opposition’ that the May version seeks to inscribe itself, stating in no uncertain terms in his introduction that “Flaubert, at least so far as *Madame Bovary* is concerned, has not been particularly well served by his translators”, who “have failed to recognise the nature and importance of the task before them” (1928: xvii-xix). The prevailing implication being that this version rises to the occasion, serves Flaubert well and, in so doing, will dispense with those flawed attempts that have come before. May’s version is therefore the very earliest evidence of rivalry, i.e. of active retranslation, given its overt antagonism towards other extant versions within the literary field in order to challenge their legitimacy.

In spite of such lofty ambitions, however, this retranslation does not succeed in securing a dominant position for itself, nor does it mark a rupture in the quantitative presence of the Marx-Aveling version. Over the next two decades, the initial translation appears at a rate of almost once every two years, alternating principally between Dent in its Everyman’s Library and Cape, publishers who privileged accessibility for an uneducated but inquiring readership. While expired copyright undoubtedly goes some way to explaining its ubiquity, Marx-Aveling’s peritextual claims of faithfulness tempered by stylistic inadequacy may also have helped to flag up its potential to Dent and Cape as a good match for its readership: more instructive in terms of its completeness than the Blanchamp version, and less daunting in terms of its language than May’s contribution.

The landscape of the literary field alters significantly in the 1950s with the entry of Penguin and OUP. It is at this point that we can also note the beginnings of more or less overt wranglings between the two as far as the publication of *Madame Bovary* is concerned, a competition which is still on-going and which has been successful in halting the re-edition of any other version, save that of Marx-Aveling. It is in 1950 that Penguin launches its Alan Russell translation, while the Gerard Hopkins version (first published by Hamish Hamilton in 1948) is taken up by OUP in 1959. There are certainly no obvious paratextual signs of altercation between the two; both Russell and Hopkins provide introductions to their respective work, but neither make reference, positive or depreciative, to any previous translation attempts. On face value, this lack of posturing might be viewed as symptomatic

of the differing agendas of the two publishing houses: little needs to be said about Penguin's paperback revolution which furnished the masses with affordable and well-designed books, while OUP set their sights on a more academic market. Different readerships; different (non-conflictual) strategies.

But it is significant that by now *Madame Bovary* has found its place in the canon of world literature, and both publishers issue the work in series dedicated to the Classics. Some overlap in readership is thus to be expected, but an OUP advertisement for *Madame Bovary* in *The Guardian* takes this encroachment further still, stating that "these good looking volumes are so cheap, yet they last a lifetime" (1959, 14). By staking a claim for design and affordability they clearly move into Penguin territory, and by emphasizing durability they launch a very thinly veiled attack on the paperback format. It follows that active rivalry is observable on the epitextual level, while the peritexts appear to disengage from blatant acts of competition. Nevertheless, the absence of challenge in the peritexts can equally attest to the presence of a particular strategy: rather than draw attention to potential translation alternatives, a tacit rejection of their very existence may go some way to securing one's own survival. This subtle dissimulation points once more to the problematic nature of active retranslations, as understood by Pym, since the peritextual challenge emerges from an act of apparent passivity.

As the economic struggle for survival in the literary field becomes fiercer, so too does the vying for dominance become more overt. OUP take the decision to issue a revised version of Hopkin's translation in 1981. Hopkins translatorial peritext is also replaced with an allographic one, namely an introduction by Oxford academic Terence Cave, and is further supplemented by a wealth of explanatory notes. In Bourdieusian terms, this is an act of symbolic violence, a deliberate attempt at legitimization through the amplification of intellectual weight, not to mention a means of expunging Hopkin's previous reflections that translation difficulties "assume enormous and insurmountable proportions" (1959, viii). In addition, the paratextual and textual revisions announce a tactic of renewal which will be perpetuated in the years to follow, and which appears to be attuned to Berman's ethos that new equals improved.

Indeed, Penguin respond to the OUP revision by replacing their Russell translation with an entirely new one by Geoffrey Wall in 1992. This particular retranslation boasts a comprehensive introduction wherein a previously unseen paratextual strategy comes to light, i.e. acknowledgment of engagement with previous versions:

Translating afresh the already translated classic, the translator is drawn into dialogue with his or her precursors. Though I was working on different principles, and though I have found that I eventually disagreed with some of their most cherished efforts, I have profited from the posthumous conversation of three previous translators of *Madame Bovary*: Eleanor Marx, Alan Russell and Gerard Hopkins. (Wall, 1992: xx)

To a certain extent, this reflection appears to circumvent the Retranslation Hypothesis by instigating a positive look *backwards* to the efforts of preceding versions. However, their influence is restricted by allusions to ‘different principles’ and to ‘disagreement’. In conjunction with the incidental mention of ‘fresh’ translation, the Wall version presents itself very much in the spirit of active contradistinction and betterment.

This pattern is repeated in the most recent British retranslation of *Madame Bovary*, carried out by Margaret Mauldon and published by OUP in 2004. Once more, the currency of the paratext is one of symbolic capital, not least on the publisher’s website where the work is advertised as the “new translation by award-winning translator Margaret Mauldon” to which “respected critic and writer Malcolm Bowie has written a wide-ranging and original new introduction” (OUP). And once more, the criterion of newness is vaunted with the implication that this latest version usurps all those that have gone before. But, as Genette warns: “*attention au paratexte!*” (1987: 413). A certain degree of collusion can be surmised in the stances adopted by Penguin and OUP, i.e. in their apparent affinity with the progressive trajectory of the Retranslation Hypothesis. On the one hand, it is important to bear in mind that improvement through retranslation is proclaimed on a paratextual level and, subsequently, that there is no guarantee it will be played out on a textual level. On the other hand, by codifying retranslation as renewal or improvement, the publishers are simultaneously defining the terms of the game and ensuring future opportunities for challenge and domination. Viewed in this light, the act of retranslation is far removed from concerns over increased source text closeness, playing instead a fundamental role in the power struggles of a given literary field.

Conclusion

This fleeting overview of *Madame Bovary* in translation has gone some way to demonstrating the elucidatory capacity of paratextual material, as well as the pertinent position occupied by the translator therein. By exploring this liminal space, insights can be gained into how translated texts are mediated and manipulated, calibrated and advertised so as to facilitate a reception which is attuned to the ambitions of the translator and the publisher. From the tentative steps of Marx-Aveling against a backdrop of national misgiving, we see Flaubert's work fall prey to the demands of a mass audience, before becoming ever more firmly inscribed in the literary canon. In addition, the strategic posturing inherent in the paratextual material recasts thinking on retranslation in a very different light. Not only does the discovery of hybridity in the Marx-Aveling versions obviate Berman's definition of initial translation and retranslation, but the supposed forward progression of retranslation loses momentum in Blanchamp's version whose lack of framing points to its commercial stratagems. Likewise, the linear axiom that time gives way to progress is exploited by publishers and translators so that increased closeness to the source text becomes less a textual reality than a dubious marketing ploy. Moving outwards to the extratextual dimension, the paratext also nuances Pym's distinction between active and passive retranslations. While active challenge is very apparent in May's translatorial peritext, this exertion does little to secure its predominance, especially over Marx-Aveling's initial version which considerably outflanks other retranslations beyond its (passive) point of origin. And while the category of active retranslation might hold in the recent overt signs of rivalry between Penguin and OUP, it does not adequately capture the more subtle designs of the paratext where opposition and (inactive) non-recognition go hand in hand. If one analogy holds in this analysis, it is that both retranslation behaviour and paratexts can be regarded as an "objet [...] multiforme et tentaculaire" (Genette, 1987, 410).

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Notes

¹ In order to contain the scope of this survey within manageable bounds, only those versions published by British publishers will be considered.

² Numerous empirical studies have explored the textual behaviour of retranslations and found this logic wanting, especially once extratextual influences have been brought to bear on the phenomenon. See Brownlie (2006), Paloposki and Koskinen (2004), and Susam-Sarajeva (2003).

³ For a discussion of the translator's Marxist reading of the novel, and an examination of the parallels between Eleanor and Emma, see Apter (2007) and Merkle (2004).

⁴ This phenomenon is not unique to Britain. Apter also notes “the curious survival of this early translation despite a long history of criticism” (2008, 73) in the US.